

Department of Workforce Development

Report to the Milwaukee W-2 Advisory Panel

September 2002

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Introduction

This report represents the culmination of a year and a half of work to review and enhance the administration of the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program in Milwaukee and to improve the services that program provides to its participants there. The policy and program changes documented in this report reflect an intensive process that began with the recommendations of Secretary Alexander's Milwaukee W-2 Advisory Panel and included ongoing oversight by the Milwaukee W-2 Monitoring Committee. Department of Workforce Development (DWD) staff devoted significant time and effort to researching and developing the recommended changes included in this report.

This report updates the November 2001 Report issued by the Department which summarized DWD's response to the Advisory Panel's original recommendations.

Background

In March 2001, the Secretary appointed the Milwaukee W-2 Advisory Panel to recommend changes to improve the administration and service delivery of W-2 after evaluating client comments from a public forum. The Advisory Panel included representatives from independent advocacy groups, state legislative staffs, regional business leaders, and public policy organizations. The panel was charged with generating practical ideas for improving the effectiveness of W-2 in serving its Milwaukee clients.

After conducting interviews, holding forums, and engaging in extensive workshops, the W-2 Advisory Panel identified five areas as having significant potential for improving the effectiveness of W-2 in Milwaukee. These areas were:

- reviewing the Milwaukee W-2 districts;
- establishing a W-2 Ombudsman;
- linking more effectively with Milwaukee employers;
- promoting training and development; and
- ensuring a safety net.

Workgroups were formed to address these five areas of concern. Out of these workgroups, a number of recommendations were developed and several broad suggestions were made.

In August 2001, DWD presented its initial summary of responses to the recommendations to the Advisory Panel and W-2 agencies. At this meeting, DWD, the Advisory Panel, and the Milwaukee W-2 agencies agreed to work together on refining the recommendations. Secretary Alexander commissioned eight workgroups to meet and review the recommendations and the Department's responses, and to prepare a list of final recommendations for DWD's consideration.

On October 2, 2001, the workgroups reported back to the Secretary, the Milwaukee Advisory Panel, and the W-2 agencies. At that meeting, Secretary Alexander announced the creation of a W-2 Monitoring Committee to oversee implementation of the recommendations in Milwaukee. This committee is comprised of the presidents of the four Milwaukee W-2 agencies, three Advisory Panel members, one Milwaukee County representative, a representative from the Milwaukee PIC, and three DWD managers.

The November 2001 report to the Advisory Panel identified the priority areas the Department would work on addressing. The W-2 Monitoring Committee began its work in December 2001 and has met through August 2002 to direct the review and implementation of the Advisory Panel's recommendations.

This report thus documents progress, under the Monitoring Committee's direction, on the Advisory Panel's original recommendations. While much has been accomplished over the past year and a half, and although much of the vision of the Advisory Panel has come to fruition, some initiatives are still under way and others have yet to begin. For this reason, the Department is taking this opportunity both to review the accomplishments of the past year and to solicit the Advisory Panel's views on priorities among the remaining recommendations for improving the administration and service delivery of the W-2 program in Milwaukee.

As the Advisory Panel winds down its active role in the development of new W-2 policy and program initiatives, members are encouraged to use the statewide W-2 Contract and Implementation (C&I) Committee as a point of contact on future concerns related to Wisconsin's W-2 program.

Update to November 2001 Report

I. Informed Choice

As part of the evolution of the W-2 program, the Department has shifted the emphasis away from a "light touch" and "diversion" philosophy. This is reflected in many of the more recent changes in policy, the W-2 Performance Standards, and other forms of communication to the W-2 agencies. However, remaining references to "light touch" and "diversion" in the W-2 Philosophical Statements and the W-2 Policy Manual made the program's priorities appear somewhat inconsistent. To remedy this, the Department has taken the following steps:

- Language pertaining to “light touch” and “diversion” has been removed from W-2 policy.
- A new philosophy emphasizing “informed choice” has been developed and issued to W-2 agencies through Administrator’s Memo 02-15 and BWP/BIMA Operations Memo 02-46. These changes will be reflected in the next release of the W-2 Manual.

II. Safety Net

The Safety Net recommendations presented a unique challenge in that they touched on many different W-2 policy areas. The method of implementation varied depending upon the suggestion; however, for the most part the implementation plan fell into three categories:

- Monitoring recommendations. All monitoring recommendations were incorporated into the Division's broader monitoring plan.
- Policy change recommendations. All policy changes were or will be implemented through W-2 Manual releases.
- Recommendations requiring coordination with the Employment System Access Coordinator (ESAC) and the Independent Participant Advocate (IPA) were forwarded to the ESAC and IPA subgroup leaders for incorporation in future ESAC and IPA contracts.

Below is a summary of all Safety Net suggestions that the Department implemented.

A. Monitoring use of emergency payments under current contract provisions.

Monitoring of emergency payments is included in the Division’s W-2 monitoring effort. In addition, appropriate brochures were updated to ensure that participants are aware of emergency payments. The Division will continue to identify when and how participants can be made aware of these payments. Also, Emergency Assistance payments will be tracked and monitored via a web-based application that should be functional by October 2002.

B. Ensuring all Fact Finding and DHA decisions are enforced.

Operations Memo 02-27 was issued in April 2002 reminding agencies of the need to comply with Fact Finding and Department Review decisions as well as the penalties associated with failing to do so. Regional staff have been monitor

ing compliance, and as of the end of July 2002 all agencies have properly complied with all decisions. The Division of Workforce Solutions will continue to explore folding this responsibility in with that of the Independent Participant Advocate (IPA) once the latter is implemented.

C. Ensuring participants are notified of impending payment reductions to allow for a reconciliation process before the payment is received.

For the most part, this issue will be addressed by the W-2 Payment Cycle Redesign workgroup. However, the Division is also working with both advocates and W-2 agency representatives via the W-2 Contract and Implementation Policy Subcommittee to further define Division policies and procedures for engaging W-2 participants who are not participating regularly.

D. Allowing benefits to be retroactive to the date of placement in the case of disputed decisions.

The Department supported retroactive benefits to applicants as a part of the Legislature's budget repair bill. However, the Governor vetoed this item, explaining that "these policy changes should receive the full review of the legislative committee process and should be addressed through separate legislation." The Department will continue to pursue this change in the legislature.

E. Monitoring sanctions to identify patterns of concern and take appropriate actions.

Monitoring sanctions has been included in the Division's monitoring plan. The Division is also reviewing sanctions through various other processes such as Non-extension Reviews, mini-Intensive Case Reviews, Consecutive Monthly Sanctioning Reviews and Fact Finding decisions made regarding client complaints of inappropriate sanctioning.

F. Reassessing all Case Management Services (CMS) placements after 30 days and monitoring placements exceeding 30 days.

The CMS review policy has been changed from 60 days to 30 days. This policy change was implemented in February 2002.

In addition, a statewide form which explains the determination by Financial and Employment Planner (FEP) that the CMS placement is appropriate, and that the client must sign when being assigned to the CMS placement, has been approved by the W-2 Contract and Implementation Committee. The Department issued the form through Operations Memo 02-53 in September 2002.

A report was created and made available to W-2 agencies in April 2002 that will assist them in tracking the length of time a W-2 participant spends in a given

CMS placement. In addition, the regions have been using a similar report for agency monitoring purposes.

G. Monitoring cases that are not processed for extensions.

This recommendation is being implemented in conjunction with a request made by the Milwaukee County Board W-2 Monitoring Task Force. A database has been developed and is in use. A preliminary report has been run and the validity of the data is being tested. The Division is still doing analysis for the Monitoring Task Force project and the results will be disseminated separately. Regional Offices have been monitoring non-extensions as indicated in the Division's monitoring plan.

H. Supporting the provision of transportation services, as appropriate, for eligible working families.

The committee recommended that policy on transportation assistance be clarified with respect to:

- allowable transportation assistance for people leaving the W-2 program;
- when and how transportation assistance is available for W-2 participants;
- ensuring transportation policies recognize the need to balance day-to-day family activities (dropping off children at school and day care, family emergencies during the work or activity times) with work program goals; and
- reinforcing the use of Job Access Loans (JALs) for automobile purchases.

The Department will issue an Operations Memo to all W-2 agencies in September that includes the above clarifications and reinforcements. The memo will emphasize the need for the W-2 agencies to work with the whole family when planning a participant's activities. The memo has statewide implications and has been reviewed by the W-2 Contract and Implementation Policy Subcommittee.

In order to continue to ensure a coordinated and systematic approach to W-2 transportation services that includes Wisconsin Employment Transportation Assistance Program (WETAP) grant providers and W-2 agencies, the Division of will be forwarding a statutory language change to allow combining both Job Ride funds and WETAP funds to draw down more funding to the Secretary's office for inclusion in the Department's 2003-2005 Biennial Budget request. Implications of the combined funding include:

- Milwaukee would no longer have to submit separate proposals for Job Ride and WETAP funds, thus allowing for more coordinated planning and service delivery.

- The flexibility of co-mingled funds can allow the state to apply for additional funds. For example, had the law been changed last year, the department could have used job access/reverse commute funds to match 50% of total program costs. Had we have been able to receive \$579,000 in local match, we could have matched JobRide/local match portion 1:1 with WETAP. Thus the \$579,000 in JobRide could have turned into as much as \$2,316,000 (\$579,000 JobRide + \$579,000 local share + \$1,158,000 in WETAP match).

Responding to recommendations that DWD explore ways of providing easier participant access to cars was complicated by federal transportation funding regulations that restrict fund use in urban areas and do not allow individual auto purchases. The Operations Memo released in September will reiterate the use of JAL funding for auto purchases and repairs statewide.

I. Monitoring Community Service Job work-sites to ensure appropriateness of activities.

In addition to reviewing all training materials and ensuring that appropriate case management and clear communication are emphasized, CSJ monitoring is included in the division-wide monitoring effort. In addition to checking for case management and appropriate activities, the monitoring includes an analysis of participants who have been in the same CSJ work-site for 12 or more months. Also, the Department reiterated the importance of the Trial Job placement in DWS Administrator's Memo 02-01 issued January 2002 and continues to look for appropriate forums in which to encourage agencies to develop Trial Job slots. Current Trial Job placements are being monitored on a monthly basis to ensure quality and policy compliance.

J. Ensuring the proactive pursuit of SSI applications for potentially eligible W-2 participants.

The recommendations from the Advisory Panel included:

- Providing detailed policy on the definition and activities involved in the SSI advocacy role and agreements.
- Pursuing a grant for specialized SSI Advocacy Training.
- Expanding the Case Management Resource Guide section on Social Security Administration Programs to include information on the role and duties of the SSI advocate, current forms, and tips on how to expedite the application process.

Detailed policy on the definition and activities involved in the SSI advocacy role was included in Operations Memo 01-77 and rolled into the W-2 Manual material

in February 2002. It included details on the activities and support services the advocate provides to participants. The memo also included local contact options for advocacy training. The next Manual release will expand this section to include detailed information on forms, timelines, and advocacy tips to assist W-2 agencies and participants when pursuing SSI. The next Manual release is scheduled in September.

Following the release of the initial memo, the DWS Training Section pursued a variety of options to provide statewide training on SSI advocacy within budgetary constraints. SSI advocacy training teaches workers SSI policy and procedures as well as techniques to assist clients with the SSI application and appeal processes. During this time local agencies were using local providers and resources to fulfill this need. As a result the statewide training was no longer necessary because local areas had provided this service to their workers. Many of the SSI advocacy training sessions counted as an Enhanced Case Management Credit.

K. Ensuring full and consistent implementation of established processes and policies regarding extensions.

All clocks policies were reviewed and language was updated to ensure that:

- agencies were not discouraged from applying for extensions when appropriate; and
- agencies understood that former W-2 participants who have reached their time limit and have either been determined not to qualify for an extension or voluntarily declined an extension have the option of returning to the program. Such participants also may have an extension request reviewed again, and seek re-review of their eligibility for such other services as Job Center services, food stamps, and Medicaid.

Note also that the Regional Offices monitor W-2 cases with a placement activity of caring for a family member during non-extension, mini-Intensive Case Reviews and during reviews of extension requests.

III. Training, Education, and Business Connection – Hard to Serve W-2 Participants

Sections III, IV, and V of this report focus on DWD's plans for improving the training, education, and business connection for hard to serve W-2 participants, job advancement for low income workers, and services to the Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET) population.

A. Ensuring the development and use of appropriate assessment tools.

As noted in the Division's original November 1, 2001 report to the W-2 Advisory Panel, the 2002-2003 W-2 RFP and Performance Standards includes language that strengthens the W-2 screening and assessment process.

A new W-2 screening process is under development with the assistance of the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Center for Addiction and Behavioral Health Research. The screening instrument is currently being pilot- tested in the field to evaluate its efficacy in identifying participants' functional employment barriers and to establish best practices for administering the tool. Next steps include finalizing the tool, automating it using a web-based application, training FEPs on administrative procedures, and implementing use of the tool on a statewide basis. The target date for statewide implementation is January 2003.

In addition, the Department continues to make progress on its initiative to develop a list of barrier triggers that will be used to guide W-2 agencies in determining when to refer a participant for a formal assessment.

B. Clarifying the need to make referrals to DVR or other appropriate providers for persons with disabilities.

The Department submitted a grant application to the federal Department of Education for funding to support efforts at employing disabled individuals, including a project focusing on services to TANF-eligible participants. That project would have funded a full-time staff person to provide technical assistance to W-2 agencies on serving persons with disabilities, and would also have funded screening and assessment efforts.

Although the Department did not receive this particular grant, it is proceeding with efforts to develop a collaborative working relationship between the Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Solutions for serving individuals who meet eligibility for both programs. As projected in our original report to the Advisory Committee late November, this initiative involves:

- Piloting a DVR/W-2 wraparound case management project aimed at providing TANF-eligible participants who have disabilities with an employability plan jointly developed and implemented between the W-2 and DVR agencies.
- Implementing cross-systems training between agencies that serve a mutual client base of individuals with employment limitations, including DVR, W-2 agencies, and other appropriate agencies.

The Divisions of Workforce Solutions and Vocational Rehabilitation are working together to move forward with this initiative.

C. Initiatives for persons who stay home with disabled family members.

Although the Department submitted a proposal to the Annie E. Casey Foundation to start a partnership with a specialized day-care center to employ parents at home allowing them to earn work credits for Social Security, Unemployment Insurance, and other work-related benefits, no funding has been awarded for this project.

The Department is also engaged in a coordinated effort with the Department of Health and Family Services to permit payment to a spouse or parent for the personal assistance services they render to an MA-eligible family member. Under this arrangement each Medicaid-eligible individual is assessed for the amount of daily in-home personal care that they need that will prevent them from entering a nursing home for the same level of care. Once assessed, the hiring of a personal care worker is authorized for the number of daily hours needed in a personal care plan.

The Departments of Workforce Development (DWD) and Health and Family Services (DHFS) have teamed up with the Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy to write a letter to federal Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Secretary Thompson. DWD and DHFS believe that submitting a letter to Secretary Thompson offers a better chance of success than applying for a waiver from Medicaid officials who have denied states this type of waiver in the recent past.

The letter will urge DHHS to reinterpret the section of the federal regulations that currently prohibits a parent from being paid Medicaid funds for the care of a disabled family member. With this letter, we hope to call attention to the desperate situation some W-2 families find themselves in as they continue to use up time on their TANF clock with no prospects for unsubsidized employment or increasing their income.

Until the above initiative is implemented, participants who are coded in CARES as remaining in the home to care for a disabled family member will be monitored carefully by the Department to ensure that the participant receives a time-limit extension when appropriate.

D. Improving the policy for aggregating training and education hours.

The Department has revised W-2 policy to increase an individual's permitted aggregate education and training hours from 258 hours in a six-month period to 516 hours over a one-year period. The policy change was released through Operations Memo 02-15 and incorporated into the W-2 Manual.

E. Improving guidance to fully implement current policies on education and training.

As noted in the previous item, the Department has provided clarification and guidance in this area, with an emphasis on application of the Technical College component and aggregating education and training hours. The policy change was released through Operations Memo 02-15 and incorporated into the W-2 Manual.

In addition, as projected in the original Department response to the W-2 advisory committee, the Department has undertaken several further initiatives in this area:

1. Designing a supportive work environment for the hard to serve W-2 population.

As proposed in the original Advisory Panel report, a concept paper addressing the application of “supported work” models in helping move “hard to serve” W-2 participants into the workforce has been prepared, and will be presented to the W-2 Contract and Implementation Committee. Over the course of two meetings, a workgroup developed an approach borrowing heavily from supported work models prevalent in vocational rehabilitation programs, but tailored to the W-2 program and population, and designed to take an innovative approach to combining barrier assessment and job placement.

This approach seeks to move beyond highly structured, sequential efforts to first diagnose and then address barriers before moving the client into transitional employment that may or may not lead to a permanent job. In essence, the concept involves folding diagnosis, treatment, and job placement into a single, continuous, intensive work-site-based process in which the effort to assess and address barriers becomes part of a more general effort to establish the client as the permanent employee of a regular enterprise. Key to this concept is making the employer and work-site, rather than the W-2 agency and FEP, the principal agents of an intensive case management process. Equally key, however, is the provision of extensive supports to the employer, in the form of technical assistance and other resources coordinated by the local W-2 agency, Workforce Development Board, and One-Stop Job Center.

The workgroup proposed that a pilot study be designed to test the concept in a major urban area (presumably Milwaukee). It was agreed that this pilot study would need to be limited to a small number of participants (30 to 50), to keep the costs within a manageable range. An agency would be selected as the site for the pilot based on its interest in doing so and the quality of its detailed implementation plan.

A final draft of a concept paper is now being submitted to the W-2 Contract and Implementation Policy Subcommittee in order to determine the level of local agency interest in participating in a pilot.

2. Addressing the training needs of recent W-2 leavers who:

- **are in part-time or seasonal jobs and are at risk of returning to cash assistance due to weak labor force attachment; or**
- **have lost their jobs due to weak skills and are presently in need of further W-2 services.**

As proposed in the original Advisory Panel report, a concept paper was drafted outlining a pilot study of a time-limited training program for W-2 leavers with these characteristics. It calls for use of a research design with random assignment of participants to determine the most effective training strategies for assisting this segment of the W-2 population in retaining full-time, year round work. The concept paper is based on an analysis coordinated with current W-2 service providers and their sub-contractors and will be submitted to the W-2 Contract and Implementation Policy Subcommittee for further action.

IV. Training, Education, and Business Connection – Job Advancement for Low Income Workers

A. Addressing unmet needs of low-income workers by assisting them in obtaining training.

1. Creating a pilot for a monthly subsidy for working family to attend training.

DWD obtained funding to implement two pilot projects to assist working families in obtaining training while working part-time.

- DWD will use \$229,000 of the remaining Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Governor's Discretionary funding to create a pilot project to provide Retention-Related Support Payments to WtW-eligible participants who work part-time and train part-time. DWD is able to use WtW funding for this purpose because the federal Department of Labor changed the policy for allowable WtW activities (see DOL TEGL 15-01). DWD released the project application June 12, and proposals were due to DWD by July 26. This project will begin in Fall 2002.
- DWD requested and received \$200,000 in WIA Pilots and Demonstrations funding from the Department of Labor for a pilot projects to provide a subsidy to WtW-eligible participants. DWD will select a provider using the

existing Application for WtW Governor's Discretionary funding (see above).

- DWS initially included a biennial budget request to obtain funding to extend these two projects beyond their planned end dates of June and May 2004. However, this project can not be funded through TANF because of the clock-ticking implications involved with providing a subsidy. Thus, this request for additional funds to extend these projects was removed from the biennial budget process and has now been referred to the W-2 Contract and Implementation Committee to pursue as an additional grant.

2. Encouraging the use of job retention and/or training bonuses.

- DWS issued guidance on utilizing these bonuses as through Operations Memo 02-15 W-2 Education and Training Policy Enhancements.
- DWS is currently considering proposals to implement job retention bonuses for W-2 participants leaving W-2 cash placements for unsubsidized employment. We are considering these in the context of available funding and core program funding needs.

B. Improving coordination in Milwaukee among DWD partners.

Eric Baker and Gerard Randall held initial meetings aimed at addressing specific Milwaukee issues, at reinstating former Local Collaborative Planning Team (LCPT) meetings on a regular basis, and at involving employers in the new meetings. This was also discussed with the W-2 Advisory Panel Monitoring Committee.

The initial LCPT meeting was held in February. There have been two subsequent meetings. Dr. Darnell Cole, President of MATC and William Clay, COO and Vice President of OIC, are the co-chairs. George Gerharz schedules and facilitates the meetings and takes notes.

C. Improving existing systems for job advancement.

Paul Saeman of DWS/Bureau of Workforce Information is leading an ongoing effort to obtain labor market information and make it available to targeted industries and occupations. This includes working with labor market analysts to inform W-2 agencies of W-2 caseload and labor market trends.

D. Using coordination and retention models from the balance of the state.

DWD will seek the assistance of the W-2 Contract and Implementation Policy Subcommittee in creating a best practices web site and developing other forums for such information. The first best practice could be a summary of programs that use job retention bonuses (see A.2. above).

We will also look for opportunities to establish forums for sharing best practices in other workforce programs such as the Workforce Attachment and Advancement program. DWS staff will ensure these efforts are coordinated with those being pursued through Contract and Implementation.

E. Fostering relationships with and enhance services to employers.

The Department has asked the W-2 Contract and Implementation Policy Subcommittee to assist in planning and forming a workgroup to discuss employer services across programs and make specific recommendations for improving coordination.

V. Training, Education, and Business Connection – FSET

The Income Maintenance (IM)/W-2/Child Care Coordination Subcommittee of the W-2 Contract and Implementation Committee and the Income Maintenance Advisory Committee are currently reviewing the FSET issues presented by the W-2 Advisory Committee. The FSET issues were placed into the Coordination Subcommittee work plan. At the June 2002 meeting the Coordination Subcommittee members reviewed the issues and recommended that the sub-committee solicit further information and guidance regarding FSET policy, procedures, and management in CARES. In August 2002 the Coordination Subcommittee reviewed issues raised by local agencies and determined that more information was needed on some while others would not receive further consideration because of workload demands or in deference to local agency preferences. The remaining issues were incorporated into the subcommittee work plan or referred to a future subcommittee meeting.

VI. CARES (Client Assistance for Re-employment and Economic Support)

W-2 Payment Cycle

The Department has agreed to implement the panel's recommendation to change W-2 payments from a monthly to a semi-monthly cycle. This change will be implemented statewide, not just in Milwaukee. In the spring of 2002, a workgroup composed of DWS policy and IT staff and W-2 program operators from Milwau

kee and balance of state met to develop the specific requirements for implementing this change.

The W-2 Payment Cycle workgroup concluded that the Advisory Panel's objective of getting payments to participants sooner could not be met by simply changing the payment cycle "at the back end." The group examined the W-2 customer flow from the front door and the resource specialist interview through eligibility and assessment, employability planning, placement, participation, attendance tracking, sanctioning, and finally check mailing or electronic direct deposit.

Because of the breadth of changes, the Department concluded the required re-engineering of the W-2 customer process could not be implemented separately from the CARES Strategic Plan. The CARES strategic planning process, undertaken jointly with the Department of Health and Family Services, calls for the separation of work programs automation from Income Maintenance automation. The Strategic Plan implementation is called "The Village Projects." The resulting work programs system, tentatively called "WorkNet," will be a contemporary, web-based application that will be far simpler for W-2 agencies to use than the CARES system. DWD remains in discussion with DHFS in regard to the CARES strategy planning process.

The enhanced W-2 customer flow, including the semi-monthly payment cycle, will be implemented as part of the Village Projects. The Department expects this to occur in state fiscal year 2003.

VII. Milwaukee Consumer Choice Initiative

Since its inception in 1997, Wisconsin Works (W-2) has received nationwide attention as an innovative welfare reform program that focuses on individuals' unique needs for achieving successful employment. Lengthy operations experience, outside evaluations, and the work of the W-2 Advisory Panel now point toward the need to improve service delivery at two critical points in the W-2 process: 1) at the moment a potential client enters the door of a W-2 agency, and 2) when, on an ongoing basis, the client feels that the system is not adequately addressing his/her unique needs. The Advisory Panel identified three structural changes in the service delivery system in Milwaukee to address these problems – the Open District, the Employment System Access Coordinator (ESAC) and the Independent Participant Advocate (IPA). Together, these three changes have come to be known as the Milwaukee Consumer Choice Initiative.

A. The Open District

At the heart of the Milwaukee Consumer Choice Initiative lies the Open District. Under this system, clients can seek services through any W-2 agency and can

switch provision of services to another agency at certain points in the service delivery process.

The underlying premise of the Open District is that consumer choice will motivate agencies to provide higher quality service, thus improving the effectiveness of the service delivery system in Milwaukee. DWD views the Open District as essential to ensuring individual choice on the road to economic stability, and regards the creation of client access and advocacy services as the most effective means of fulfilling that obligation.

B. The Employment System Access Coordinator (ESAC)

Because the Open District assumes detailed client knowledge about the W-2 service delivery network in Milwaukee, effective implementation of the Open District requires tools for providing such information to customers. Because they provide consumers with access to neutral information, the Employment Systems Access Coordinators (ESAC) form a crucial part of the infrastructure necessary to support the operation of an Open District.

In each Milwaukee W-2 office, the Employment Systems Access Coordinator will serve as the potential client's first point of contact with the W-2 program. With access to ESAC services, clients will have resources for navigating through the system and will be able to make informed choices in seeking W-2 services.

C. The Independent Participant Advocate (IPA)

The Independent Participant Advocate (IPA) complements the ESAC by performing mediation services and providing impartial information to clients already participating in the W-2 process. As a "troubleshooter," each IPA will help mediate disputes between customers and agencies over such issues as placements and sanctioning. In addition to clarifying reasons for a monetary sanction or disputed placement, the IPA will advocate for the customer, explaining customer rights and responsibilities and providing other information to clients as the latter make decisions about their W-2 participation. IPAs would also analyze client and program outcomes to identify areas for program improvement, particularly with respect to the handling of client-agency conflicts.

Summary

Implementing the ESAC and the IPA will require additional funding. The Department has unsuccessfully sought private foundation funding during the past nine months to pilot these efforts. Implementing an Open District would benefit from statutory authority to authorize such a change. At this time, DWD is seeking direction from the Advisory Panel regarding priorities for future action.